

AO 91 (Rev. 11/11) Criminal Complaint

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF MISSISSIPPI

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

for the

Southern District of Mississippi

United States of America)

v.)

STEFAN PETE ROWOLD)

Case No.)

1:24-mj- SG8-RPM)_____
Defendant(s)

ARTHUR JOHNSTON, CLERK

CRIMINAL COMPLAINT

I, the complainant in this case, state that the following is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

On or about the date(s) of July 4, 2024 and July 7, 2024 in the county of Stone in the
Southern District of MS, Southern Division, the defendant(s) violated:

*Code Section**Offense Description*

Title 18 U.S.C. § 844(i)

Whoever maliciously damages or destroys, or attempts to damage or destroy, by means of fire or an explosive, any building, vehicle, or other real or personal property used in interstate or foreign commerce or in any activity affecting interstate or foreign commerce.

This criminal complaint is based on these facts:

See Affidavit attached hereto and incorporated herein.

☒ Continued on the attached sheet.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Stephen N. Fortunato".

Complainant's signature

Stephen N. Fortunato, Special Agent, FBI

Printed name and title

Sworn to before me and signed in my presence.

Date:

7-11-2024

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Robert P. Myers, Jr.".

*Judge's signature*City and state: Gulfport, Mississippi

Robert P. Myers, Jr., U.S. Magistrate Judge

Printed name and title

AFFIDAVIT

1. I, Stephen N. Fortunato, being first duly sworn, hereby depose and state as follows:

INTRODUCTION AND AGENT BACKGROUND

2. I make this affidavit in support of a criminal complaint alleging STEFAN PETE ROWOLD violated Title 18 U.S.C. § 844(i) whoever maliciously damages or destroys, or attempts to damage or destroy, by means of fire or an explosive, any building, vehicle, or other real or personal property used in interstate or foreign commerce or in any activity affecting interstate or foreign commerce

3. The Affiant is currently employed by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Jackson Division, Gulfport Resident Agency (RA), MS, as a Special Agent (SA). The Affiant has been employed by the FBI since March 2019. My current and primary duties at the FBI include the investigation of violent crimes, organized narcotics traffickers, criminal enterprises, bank robberies, human trafficking investigations, child exploitation, color of law violations, hate crimes, and other various criminal acts. I have participated in numerous investigations including violent crime. Through my training, knowledge, and experience, I have become familiar with investigations involving hate crimes.

4. Based on my training and experience and the facts set forth in this affidavit, there is probable cause to believe that STEFAN PETE ROWOLD violated Title 18 U.S.C. § 844(i). This Affidavit is intended to show only that there is sufficient probable cause for the criminal complaint charging STEFAN PETE ROWOLD with the above violations and does not set forth all of my knowledge about this matter. The information provided is based upon my personal knowledge or that of other sworn law enforcement officers participating in this investigation.

STATUTES

5. Title 18 U.S.C. §844(i) Whoever maliciously damages or destroys, or attempts to damage or destroy, by means of fire or an explosive, any building, vehicle, or other real or personal property used in interstate or foreign commerce or in any activity affecting interstate or foreign commerce

SUMMARY OF PROBABLE CAUSE

6. There is probable cause to believe that STEFAN PETE ROWOLD damaged religious property by using fire and other means on or about July 4, 2024 and July 7, 2024, in the Southern Division of the Southern District of Mississippi. On July 7, 2024 members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints entered their church building in Wiggins, Mississippi. They discovered that someone had vandalized the property and attempted to burn it down. STEFAN PETE ROWOLD was identified as a person of interest and ultimately confessed to attempting to burn the building down due to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints's religious beliefs. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints operated in interstate and foreign commerce as it is funded by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Utah and also sends its received donations to Utah.

PROBABLE CAUSE

7. On or about Thursday, July 4, 2024, STEFAN PETE ROWOLD, gained entry into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) located at 722 Hall Street, Wiggins, MS 39577, (hereinafter referenced as "the LDS Building") by breaking the rear glass door using a cinder block. Upon entry, ROWOLD obtained a marker and wrote on the walls throughout the LDS Building. Examples of ROWOLD's writing includes but is not limited to, "Child

Molesters”, “False Prophets”, “Sex Traffickers”, “Cowards”, “Kids call 911 for help”, and “you will never reach heaven here”.

8. ROWOLD then gathered hymnals, paintings, and other self- portraits and began piling them in the center of one of the rooms of the LDS Building. He then used the items as kindling and lit them on fire. ROWOLD added a desk and a piano in attempts to spread the fire. ROWOLD exited the LDS Building and the fire eventually dissipated on its own.

9. On July 7, 2024, an LDS member entered the LDS Building for church service and observed the damage caused by the fire and writings on the walls. The member immediately called 911 and the Wiggins Police Officers responded to the LDS Building. While on Scene, Officers observed ROWOLD in the area and were able to identify him due to ROWOLD being a local homeless person and a known sex offender.

10. ROWOLD later realized he was unsuccessful in burning the entire building down so he went back to try it again. When he returned to the LDS Building he observed the crime scene tape and waited for law enforcement to leave. Once they did, ROWOLD entered the LDS Building and attempted to light another fire, but this time, he started the fire against the wall in order to catch the building on fire. After ROWOLD started the fire, he remained in the area to observe first responders, however, he didn’t see anything. So, ROWOLD made his way back to the LDS Building to observe the situation.

11. While on scene, law enforcement officers observed ROWOLD in the area again. ROWOLD was then determined to be a person of interest and was later detained for failing to register as a sex offender and was transported to Wiggins Police Department to be interviewed regarding the damage at the LDS Building.

12. During the interview, after being advised of his rights, ROWOLD confessed to breaking into the LDS Building on both occasions and lighting fires inside the building in attempts to burn it down. He provided the information set forth in paragraph 11 above. In addition, ROWOLD claimed to be “reborn into Christ” and “felt called to take action”. ROWOLD believed LDS was responsible for trafficking, molesting, raping, and grooming children. ROWOLD claimed the LDS belief that “Jesus chose them to do his will on earth is blasphemy”. ROWOLD believed the LDS declared war against Christians. As ROWOLD was writing on the walls of the LDS Building, he got angrier and decided the writings alone would not be enough, so he attempted to burn the LDS Building to the ground. ROWOLD gave a written confession. The handwriting in the confession was similar to the hand writing on the walls of the LDS Building.

13. The LDS takes in about \$6,000 to \$8,000 dollars a month from its congregation that meets in the LDS Building. All of those funds are sent to the LDS main office located in Salt Lake City Utah. The congregation that meets at the LDS Building also gets all of their funding for property, maintenance, insurance, church programs, etc. from the main office in Salt Lake City which also owns the LDS building. Due to the damage, LDS was unable to have their Sunday service where they receive most of their donations. Therefore, ROWOLD’s offense occurred in and affected interstate commerce.

14. Accordingly, there is probable cause to believe that STEFAN PETE ROWOLD intentionally broke and maliciously attempted to destroy the LDS Building by means of fire, there is probable cause to believe ROWOLD violated Title 18 U.S.C. §844(i).

Respectfully submitted,



Stephen N. Fortunato
Special Agent
Federal Bureau of Investigation

Subscribed and sworn to before me

on July 11, 2024



THE HONORABLE ROBERT P. MYERS, JR.
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE